



Gastronomic Asturias & Cantabria

Spain's hidden paradise on the Emerald Coast

7–14 June 2024 (MK 315)

8 days • £3,660

Lecturer: Gijs van Hensbergen

A region of outstanding beauty, with the Picos de Europa mountains and their lush foothills leading right down to the Atlantic coast.

Local produce of the highest quality, including some of Spain's finest cheeses, Cantabrian anchovies and excellent seafood.

Rustic meals in cider houses, fine dining in Michelin-starred restaurants and visits to local producers

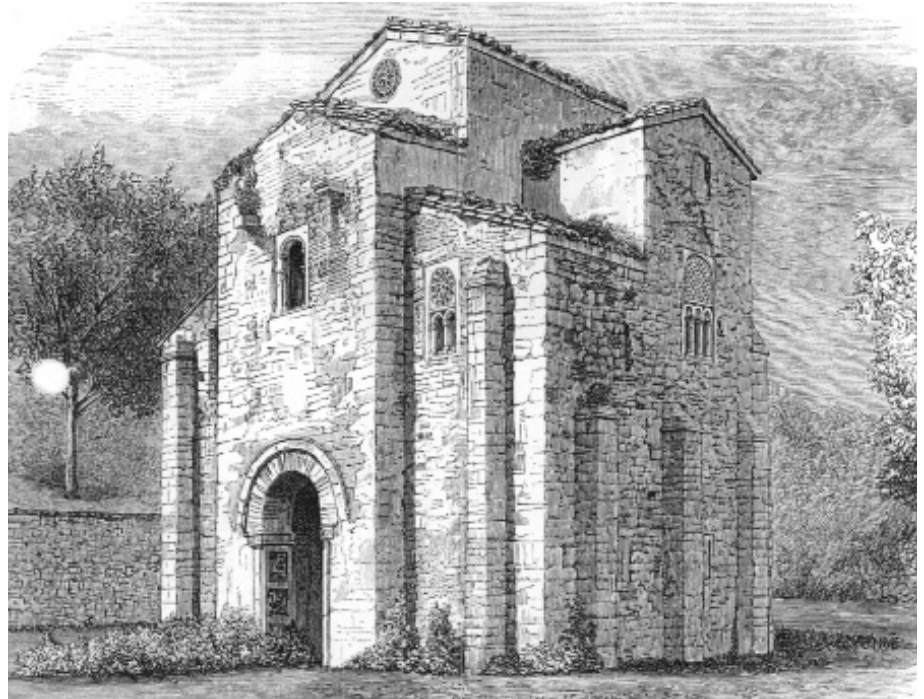
A broad range of art and architecture taken in en route, from Pre-Romanesque to Gaudí.

With the spectacular Picos de Europa as backdrop, the undulating foothills roll out their green carpet down to the Atlantic beaches and fishing ports. From Oviedo across to Santander, the gastronomy of both Asturias and Cantabria talks 'product', purity and honesty. There is the mythic Cabrales cheese matured in mountain caves – a flavour bomb – and at Santoña the world's finest anchovies: sweet, salty, deceptively fruity, prepared for us there and then – totally unique. In Asturias cider is king, but in recent years the tiny mountainside *denominación* of Cangas del Narcea – just eight 'heroic' producers braving the vertiginous slopes – has been producing prizewinning wines of wonderful depth and complexity.

Asturias, never subdued by the Moors, is Spain's Ur region – its heart and soul – where Covadonga is celebrated as the site of the first Christian victory over the Moors in 722. We visit the shrine and move on to Casa Marcial's mountaintop two Michelin star restaurant, where Nacho Manzano and his sisters Esther, Olga and Sandra take us on an amazing journey through Asturian cuisine in their family home.

Outside Gijón at Casa Gerardo, the father and son team of Pedro and Marcos Moran deliver a masterclass in rethinking iconic dishes like the mythic Fabada Asturiana, transforming the ubiquitous one pot stew into a miraculous expression of nature's bounty pared back to its essence – there is nowhere to hide, and no need to.

Down on the coast the freshly landed shellfish mariscada is a hands-on cornucopia of



Oviedo, San Miguel de Lillo, wood engraving c. 1880.

clams, crabs, the sweetest of prawns and lobster washed down with spritzzy fresh wine. This is the land of luxury villas built by the 19th-century *Indianos* – the nouveau riche returning from Habana showing off their wealth; most notably in Comillas, where Gaudí was employed to build the hedonistic El Capricho.

Our tour celebrates the creativity of Asturias and Cantabria's extraordinary people. At Santoña a group of friends got together to create a unique bar to celebrate their God – the anchovy. Close to Santander there are vineyard visits, producers obsessed with detail, daring innovation and thinking outside the box. In Santander's market, cheesemaker Jose Maria Alonso, one time MP in Spain's Cortes and President of Spain's artisan producers, leads a special tasting interspersed with a visit to the museum of pre-history in the basement below.

The complex thread of product and technique, new world ingredients versus ancient ways is crafted into a brilliant finale by Jesús Sánchez at his three-star Cenador de Amos, arguably the most beautiful restaurant in the world.

Itinerary

Day 1: Oviedo. Fly at c. 11.30am (Vueling) from London Gatwick to Oviedo. The Museo de Bellas Artes has a collection including El Grecos, Goyas and a wonderful suite of *bodegones* by Melendez as well as Picasso, Miró, Tàpies and Sorolla. Along the Boulevard Gascona we feast on *cachopos* (stuffed veal breaded fillets) and game meatballs, all washed down with cider poured and aerated from a height by gymnastic staff. First of three nights in Oviedo.

Day 2: Naranco, Prendes, Oviedo. Visit Mount Naranco on the outskirts of Oviedo, with the neighbouring Pre-Romanesque churches of Sta Maria del Naranco and San Miguel de Lillo. Lunch at the legendary five-generation Casa Gerardo (1 Michelin star) focuses on rethinking the classics of Asturian cuisine. Early evening visit to Oviedo's Cathedral and the Camara Santa reliquary.

Day 3: Cangas del Narcea. Up in the mountains of Cangas del Narcea – still home to wild bears – we follow the Narcea river up past reservoirs to the tiny boutique, literally garage wine producers of this tiny wine zone. The

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charming wine museum surrounded by ancient bodegas is followed by a riverside walk up to the award winning Martinez Parrondo. Lunch is back in town in the rustic Sidrería Narcea, followed by a visit to Beatriz Perez's Vidas bodega hanging over the town.

Day 4: Covadonga, La Salgar, Ribadesella.

To round off Asturias we visit the Covadonga shrine and lunch at the 2-star Casa Marcial, with its breathtaking mountaintop views and a unique marriage of their emblematic dishes with the best of world ciders. We move on to the idyllic beach village of Ribadesella for an evening light taste of exquisite brevity coupled with the greatest of Asturian wines. Overnight in Ribadesella.

Day 5: Comillas, San Vicente, Santander. En route to Santander we stop off at Comillas and see exteriors of the great modernista houses including Gaudí's El Capricho. At Bodegas Miradorio the experimental wine process produces wines and bubbles with refreshing acidity. Lunch is a wonderful seafood feast at the fishing port of San Vicente de la Barquera. On arriving at Santander see Renzo Piano's Centro Botin, a contemporary art space with views across the bay. First of three nights in Santander.

Day 6: Santander, Santoña. We start the day with a cheese tasting at the Mercado del Este, savouring a variety of Cantabrian cheeses and world champion gold medal winners, followed by the museum of pre-history. In Santoña, anchovy central, passionate anchovistas prepare their star ingredient six ways, including freshly prepared at the minute, smoked and finally brined for 12 months. This light lunchtime repast precedes a unique vineyard visit up in the neighbouring hills.

Day 7: Santander. A free morning and market opportunities at the Mercado de Esperanza are followed by optional visits to El Embarcadero gallery and the Luis Quintanilla murals in the University Paraninfo. Lunch is at the 3-star Cenador de Amós, a brilliant climax to the week.

Day 8. Drive to Bilbao for an early afternoon flight to London Gatwick, arriving c. 2.45pm.

Lecturer

Gijs van Hensbergen. Art historian and author specialising in Spain and the USA. His books include *The Sagrada Familia* (2017), *Gaudí*,

In the Kitchens of Castile and Guernica and he has published in the *Burlington Magazine* and *Wall Street Journal*. He read languages at Utrecht University and Art History at the Courtauld, and undertook postgraduate studies in American art of the 1960s. He has worked in England, the USA and Spain as exhibitions organiser, TV researcher and critic and is a Fellow of the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies at the LSE.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,660 or £3,520 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,990 or £3,850 without flights.

Included: air travel on Vueling flights (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 6 lunches and 2 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all wine and food tastings; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Eurostars Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo (eurostarshotels.co.uk): 5-star hotel in a converted 17th-century hospice. **Gran Hotel del Sella, Ribadesella** (granhoteldelsella.com): 4-star seafront hotel in a 19th-century mansion with a modern wing. **Soho Boutique Palacio de Pombo, Santander** (sohohoteles.com): well-located 4-star hotel in the city centre; 19th-century palace with modern rooms. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? Evening meals tend to begin at 9.00pm and some late nights are inevitable, though most of the main meals are at lunch time. There is a fair amount of walking in city centres where vehicle access is restricted. Much of the area covered is hilly, and vineyard visits require walking and standing around on steep and uneven terrain. A good level of fitness is essential; you will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Some days involve a lot of driving – average distance by coach per day: 67 miles.

Gastronomic tours. On a tour that focuses on food, wine and cooking traditions, we regret that participants with special diets may not have the same gastronomic experience as those with no restrictions. Please discuss your requirements with us before booking.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.